

# Zion Lutheran Church, Long Valley, NJ

## Sanctuary: Guidelines for returning to in-person worship

In September, Congregation Council approved the recommendation of the Reopening Task Group (RTG) to resume in-person worship in the sanctuary with the safety measures expressed here. No matter where we worship, we will offer a live-stream option.

### Foundation of recommendations

The recommendations of the RTG are grounded in the Christian's love of neighbor; that is, how can we keep our neighbor as safe as possible when resuming in-person gatherings? Not only did Jesus teach that the two greatest commandments were loving God and loving the neighbor (Mark 12), but when writing to congregations in Galatia, the Apostle Paul intimates that faith is how the Christian loves God, and that loving the neighbor is a natural outcome of faith, "*For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'*" (Galatians 5)

### Assumptions

- **Mechanisms of COVID-19 transmission** - primarily through respiratory droplets and aerosols (breathing, speaking, singing, coughing, sneezing), and less likely, surface contact by infected. Both symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals are understood to be contagious.
- **Zion should not be ahead of local, state, federal governmental authority guidelines** – and we could lag, if we thought it would be safer. The most recent guidelines are 25% of capacity, with social distancing. From this, we have discerned a limit of 64 people in Zion's sanctuary

### New safety measure

We have purchased 2 high-volume barn fans that are placed in Field's Hall and the narthex to pull air out of the sanctuary during the service. These will be supplemented by the existing attic fan in the steeple that will draw air upward and outside - so that the air exchange in the sanctuary will be higher and thus safer.

### Guidelines

- **Illness** - Individuals who do not feel well should stay home
- **Masks** - All attendees, including worship leaders, will be required to wear a mask which reduces the risk of spread of coronavirus, including those who are pre-symptomatic or asymptomatic.
- **One-way pathways** will be used to enter and exit the worship space. People should enter through the front, sanctuary doors and exit by pew through the sacristy/kitchen door. We will prop the doors open to minimize person-to-person and surface contacts.
- **Hand sanitizer, masks and disinfectant surface wipes** will be available in the narthex.
- **Seating** will be marked with laminated placards for easy identification. Households should sit together which means that the placards will probably not be exact and people will need to use their own discernment for social distancing.
- **Singing** –Based on scientific evidence regarding viral spread via aerosolization during vocalization, including singing, the service will be conducted without congregational singing. In other words, if a person unknowingly has COVID-19, singing would transmit the virus even through a mask.
- **Bulletins** - will not be reused so that people should take theirs home after each service. Parishioners are welcome to print their own materials at home, if desired (from the website). All books will be removed from pews in the sanctuary before worship is resumed there.
- **Offering** – For convenience, an offering receptacle will be placed at the entry and exit pathway into which people can securely place their offering. We will not use offering plates so as to avoid passing an object between multiple hands.

- **Sharing the peace of the Lord** – We will continue to remain in place to share the peace using communication by sign language. Example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bJ0cXDJy10o>
- **Holy Communion** – We will celebrate the sacrament indoors in accordance with best practices that are consistent and communicate Lutheran teachings and keep people as safe as possible. The weekly Happenings will inform the congregation when Communion will occur.
- **Rest rooms-** Limited to one user/household at a time to avoid close contact and permit use of both rooms as gender neutral to maximize availability
  - **Disinfectant wipes** will be available as we can find them.
  - Paper hand towels will be provided in both facilities so that users can dry their hands and then use the towel to open the door to exit the restroom, and **place the towel in a trash bin outside the bathroom door**
- **Contact Tracing** - A photograph of the group at each service will be taken by the usher in case subsequent contact tracing is necessary to identify attendees.
  - **If you have been at worship and contract COVID-19**, please let Pastor Ingrid know so that we can inform others in order to limit the spread. Your identity will be kept confidential if you desire.
- **Beginning with RSVPs** - Due to social distancing requirements there is a limit of 64 people in the sanctuary space, and because we don't know how many people will attend, we are asking people to sign up for worship either by calling the church at 908-876-3547, emailing the church at [zionlongvalley@gmail.com](mailto:zionlongvalley@gmail.com), or using the sign-up link that will be mailed each week with the Happenings.
- **Possible second worship service** - If reservations are full, then we will begin a waiting list. If we consistently have a waiting list, then we will consider having 2 services each Sunday. A second service will include the need for volunteers to help sanitize parts of the sanctuary in between services.
- **Refusal to follow guidelines** - At each worship service, participants will be reminded of the need to be respectful of the concerns and safety of others and that the guidelines are grounded in love and concern for the neighbor. If anyone attending worship refuses to follow these guidelines (e.g. removal of their mask), Pastor will offer a prayer and then dismiss the assembly so as not to jeopardize everyone's health and safety by commencing worship. If many people refuse to follow guidelines, we will resume live-stream worship.

*Council wishes to thank the Reopening Task Group for their work!*